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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 CHISINAU 000355

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM NATO EU RS MD

SUBJECT: NATO PULLOUT PART OF LARGER PICTURE:  
ACTING FM OSTALEP ON NATO, KOSOVO, EASTERN  
PARTNERSHIP AND RUSSIA

Classified by: Charge d'Affaires Kelly A.  
Keiderling for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a May 6 meeting Acting Foreign Minister Valeriu Ostalep acknowledged Russian pressure on Moldova to pull out of the NATO exercises in Georgia, but claimed that this decision did not represent a larger change in Moldova's ongoing interactions with NATO. Ostalep said that Moldova would not invite Kosovo to participate in the June 4 Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) meeting because Moldova did not recognize Kosovo. The most likely compromise would be having an UNMIK representative. Ostalep complained about the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative: nothing new and Moldova didn't want to be lumped in with former Soviet countries which had little interest in or likelihood of obtaining EU membership. He acknowledged increasing Russian engagement with Moldova over the past few months, while criticizing EU failure to engage. End Summary

NATO Exercise Pullout Dictated From Above

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¶2. (C) After participating in year-long planning sessions and confirming its attendance, on April 29 Moldova announced that it was pulling out of the Longbow/Lancer 2009 NATO exercises scheduled May 6 - June 1 in Georgia. Charge d'Affaires met with Acting Foreign Minister Valeriu Ostalep on May 6 to register USG disappointment about this decision and concern that it was part of a larger shift in policy away from military-security interaction with NATO and Western countries. Ostalep openly admitted that Russia had pressured Moldova not to participate. He explained that the "leadership" (i.e., President Voronin) had made the decision and informed the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Charge asked for an explanation of the decision. Ostalep had none. He promised to pass U.S. Embassy concerns up to the leadership, and inquire if further information could be provided on this decision.

¶3. (C) Asked whether the decision represented a shift away from Moldovan interaction with NATO and Western partners, Ostalep opined that this pullout was an isolated case and did not represent a larger change in Moldovan policy. He noted that on May 14 a NATO International Partnership Action Plan team would visit Chisinau.

Kosovo Participation in RCC

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¶4. (C) Moldova will host the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) meeting in Chisinau on June 4. The RCC includes Kosovo as a member. Kosovo's participation is problematic for Moldova, since Moldova does not recognize Kosovo. Moldova's opposition to recognizing Kosovo is based upon a fear that it could set a precedent for foreign (i.e., Russian) recognition of Transnistria.

¶5. (C) In response to the Charge's question about Kosovo participation in the RCC meeting, Ostalep said that the most likely resolution would be to have Kosovo represented through UNMIK participation. He explained that the Serbs were against extending an invitation to Kosovo and, since the RCC took decisions by consensus, Moldova could not invite Kosovo as a guest of the Moldovan host over Serbian objections. Ostalep said the Serbs did not object to UNMIK participation. The Acting FM added that, though the MFA had earlier considered inviting Kosovo as a guest of the chair, the "leadership" above his position had since taken a political decision not to invite Kosovo.

Eastern Partnership Problematic

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¶6. (C) President Voronin decided not to attend the Eastern Partnership Summit in Prague on April 7 and asked Foreign Minister Stratian to represent Moldova. Ostalep, who has been deeply involved in

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Moldova-EU relations for six years, said that since the announcement of the Eastern Partnership initiative last fall, Moldova had been skeptical about it.

¶7. (C) Ostalep complained that the Eastern Partnership (EP) had no clear goals and held no concrete road to EU membership for Moldova. The partnership was offering 600 million Euros to six countries for five years, which amounted to 20 million per country per year. This sum would not be given directly to the country, he grumbled, but would be "project based," i.e., spent to cover the expenses of EU experts. Ostalep added that the proposed projects were not new and were not what Moldova wanted (intensified political dialogue, free trade and visa facilitation). Some projects would focus on democracy, human rights and media freedom, for example. Ostalep noted that the EU had already spent more than 200 million Euros over the last 15 years on such projects, with little progress to show for these expenditures. In comparison, Russia was offering 200 million dollars to the secessionist Transnistrian region for this year. The EP grouped Moldova with nations which had little interest in or few prospects for EU membership. If Moldova participated in the EP, Ostalep added, his country would be mired in a bickering, ineffectual group. We already see that GUAM isn't effective, so why do we need a mini-CIS, Ostalep asked rhetorically. Moldova preferred to have a direct relationship with the EU, not through the EP. Participating in the Eastern Partnership would also cost Moldova money, as experts would have to travel to meetings in Brussels with no clear goal.

¶8. (C) Ostalep informed us that Stratian's speech in Prague would contain no reference to the Eastern Partnership, but rather would focus on Moldova's bilateral relations with the EU. The Acting Foreign Minister predicted that the Eastern

Partnership would not work. In trying to adopt a final declaration on the launching of the EP, Ostalep stated, Armenia and Azerbaijan were already fighting. The EP countries would have a hard time agreeing on anything, given their disparate interests. Ostalep also revealed that Russia had asked the GOM about the Eastern Partnership and questioned what it meant. The Acting FM discounted Russian criticism of the EP as a major factor in Moldova's dislike of the EP, noting that Moldova had questioned the Eastern Partnership all along.

Foreign Policy Orientation - Russia or EU?

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¶ 9. (C) The Charge noted that several Moldovan decisions on the NATO exercises, FM Stratan's visit to Moscow on the way to the Eastern Partnership summit, and Moldova's acceptance of the 2+1 declaration on Transnistria suggested Russian pressure in determining Moldova's foreign policy. Ostalep agreed that, since the beginning of 2009, Moldova and Russia had engaged in more intensive contacts. However, he denied any overall Russian hand in Moldova's day-to-day conduct of its foreign policy.

¶ 10. (C) Ostalep charged that in comparison with Russia, the EU had been notably absent. Last year, after the end of the EU-Moldova Action Plan, the EU failed to start negotiations on a new agreement. The EU had explained that, in advance of the 2009 election, it did not want to get involved in Moldovan domestic politics. In addition, GOM requests to the EU about establishing a trafficking in persons/illegal migration consultative group had gone unanswered. There had been no high-level EU visit all year, until EU Secretary General Solana's visit in the wake of the post-electoral crisis. The EU offered no response on Moldova's requests for visa facilitation for one year, despite three letters from Voronin to the EU arguing that the visa situation was threatening the security of Moldova.

¶ 11. (C) While the EU was offering no serious

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movement, Russia was making significant overtures, commented Ostalep. Russia was offering Moldova more intense engagement. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov had visited, and Russia was intensifying its engagement on 5-plus-2, an offer President Voronin could not reject. Ostalep acknowledged that Moldova was indeed taking the Russian position into account more than before.

¶ 12. (C) Ostalep said that we should not expect major changes in Moldova's foreign policy when the new government was in place, though the MFA would have new leadership. He personally expected to leave the MFA but remain within the government structure. There might be some changes in tactics, said Ostalep, but no changes in foreign policy priorities. Ostalep expected Moldova's major foreign policy challenges to remain a new agreement with the EU, resolving problems with Romania, demarcation of the border with Ukraine and Ukrainian relations in general, the role of Russia, the economic crisis and Transnistria.

The Transnistrian Angle

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¶ 13. (C) Ostalep said that an "official Moldovan

interpretation" of the 2-plus-1 declaration signed in Moscow on March 18 would be necessary over the coming months. Ostalep predicted that Russian negotiator Valery Nesterushkin would keep rejecting 5-plus-2.

Transnistrian leader Igor Smirnov, too, would reject any proposals and hence sabotage any 5-plus-2 progress, Ostalep thought. Ostalep noted that Transnistria was increasingly caught up in an internal power struggle between Smirnov and Transnistrian parliamentary leader Yevgeni Shevchuk. By parliamentary act, Shevchuk was trying to amend the constitution to eliminate the post of Vice President and hence remove Vice President Alexander Koroliev. Ostalep noted that these developments were not good for Moldova or for the 5-plus-2 process, as the Transnistrians would be concentrating on their own internal problems.

#### Concerns about Harassment of NGOs and Media

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¶14. (C) The Charge concluded by mentioning our concerns about governmental investigations of NGOs and newspapers, pointing out that such actions were another black mark on Moldova's reputation after the elections and not worthy of Moldova. Ostalep said he would convey these concerns, too, to the leadership.

#### Comment

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¶15. (C) We see Russia playing a more active role in Moldovan decision making. Voronin capitulated to Russian pressure on the NATO exercises in Georgia. Increasing Russian influence led to Voronin's March 18 signature of the 2-plus-1 agreement in Moscow. Since rejecting the Kozak Memorandum in 2003, Voronin has tried to stand firm in his relations with Russia, making his capitulation now, in the post-electoral period of his Acting Presidency, even more mystifying. Voronin has been reacting viscerally more often in recent weeks. One EU ambassador described his behavior as "erratic." We are unlikely to see many presidential decisions based on a carefully reasoned weighing of Moldova's interests in the brief period Voronin has left as Acting President.

¶16. (C) I was reminded of different styles of foreign relations in our conversation with Ostalep: one based on a leader's emotion and personal relations and another based on dispassionate reason and interests. Moldovan leaders certainly value personal relationships and interaction over a cool assessment of national interests. Ostalep personified Moldova's relationship with an aloof EU and an embracing Russia. The EU had ignored Moldova's requests and failed to visit, while Russia had sent its senior

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leaders and made itself felt as a partner.

¶17. (C) High-level USG attention to Moldova in the form of visits by senior U.S. officials would increase Moldova's sense that the U.S. is closely engaged and that U.S. interests should be taken into account more carefully. Such high-level U.S. engagement could repeat our messages about the importance of Moldova's demonstrating support for democratic values and finding a way to reconcile the government with the post-electoral concerns of its citizens.

